

Message Text

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TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 026125 TOSEC 020027

NODIS

FOLLOWING TELEGRAM SENT ACTION SECSTATE FROM AMMAN DTD 03 FEB 1976

RPTD YOU QUOTE

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 AMMAN 0603

NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IS, US, JO

SUBJECT: MESSAGE FOR RIFAI

REF: STATE 024972

SUMMARY: DELIVERED SECRETARY'S ORAL MESSAGE TO RIFAI, WHO WANTS MORE SPECIFIC US PROPOSALS AND IS SKEPTICAL US WILL NOT ATTEMPT STAGNATION IN 1976; SAYS US VETO HAS HURT US. RIFAI WHO JUST SAW ASAD QUOTED ASAD THAT US LOST OPPORTUNITY TO BRING ABOUT DE FACTO PALESTINIAN (PLO) RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL. RIFAI OUTLINED TWO POSSIBLE COURSES FOR FUTURE: (1) UNILATERAL ISRAELI PULLBACK ON GOLAN; (2) INVITE PLO TO GENEVA FROM OUTSET. WITHOUT PLO, SYRIA WILL NOT ATTEND GENEVA. RIFAI FLOOMY ABOUT PEACE PROSPECTS IN 1976 OR BEYOND; PREDICTS MOVEMENT
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OF WORLD AND US PUBLIC OPINION AND SUPPORT TOWARDS ARABS, AND IS AFRAID IN THAT EVENT OF ISRAEL RESORTING TO WAR TO AVOID WITHDRAWAL. SAYS SYRIAN-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS STILL BAD AND SAUDIS UNABLE TO HELP IMPROVE-MENT; RIFAI CLAIMS JORDAN IS MODERATING INFLUENCE ON SYRIA

(VIA UNDOF RENEWALS AND LEBANON) AND IS CONSIDERED "WINDOW TO WEAT" BY ASAD. ON NEXT MIDEAST DEVELOPMENTS RIFAI PREDICTS SYRIAN WILL TRY FOR SIMILAR UNSC RESOLUTION AT TIME OF MAY UNDOF MANDATE RENEWAL, FORCING US TO VETO (OR ABSTAIN) OR TO FACT NON-RENEWAL OF UNDOF. DESPITE RIFAI'S ARGUMENTS, ASAD IGNORES DANGER IN THAT COURSE OF PROVOKING ISRAELI ATTACK. UNDOF RENEWAL UP AGAIN IN NOVEMBER AND SYRIA BELIEVES THEY WILL GRADUALLY GET MORE AND MORE SUPPORT IN UN LEADING TO ISRAELI UN EXPULSION IN AUTUMN UNGA. RIFAI THOUGHT SYRIANS AND JORDAN COULD NOT ACCEPT PLO IN A COMBINED ARAB DELGATION BUT IMPLIED IT NOT COMPLETELY OUT OF QUESTION. I BELIEVE RIFAI (AND ASAD) WANT TO AVOID WAR, BUT MAY BE UNDERESTIMATING DANGERS OF AN OUTBREAK AS RESULT THEIR DIPLOMATIC GAMBLING IN SUCH CASES AS UPCOMING MANDATE RENEWAL IN MAY. END SUMMARY.

1. I HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEE RIFAI MORNING FEBRUARY 3 TO DELIVER MESSAGE REFTEL. (RIFAI WAS ABSENT FROM JORDAN YESTERDAY ON A VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA.)

2. RIFAI THANKED ME FOR TE MESSAGE. HE SAID THAT HE HOPES SOON HE COULD HAVE SOME MORE SPECIFICS ABOUT WHAT THE US ACTUALLY HAD IN MIND. HE SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN TOLD BEFORE THERE WOULD BE NO STAGNATION OR STALE-MATE IN THE SITUATION, BUT THE VETO HAD DONE SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE AND THERE WERE STILL NO SIGNS OF MOVEMENT FROM US. THE SYRIANS WERE NOT COMPLETELY RIGID IN THEIR POSITION OF INSISTING THAT THE PLO BE AT GENEVA FROM THE OUTSET. RIFAI ASKED WHEN IN WOULD BE GOING BACK TO WASHINGTON. I SAID I DID NOT KNOW BUT PRESUMED IT WOULD PROBABLY BE SOMETIME IN FEBRUARY.

3. I THEN ASKED RIFAI WHAT HE THOUGHT WE OUGHT TO DO. RIFAI SIAD AS WE KNEW HE HAD BEEN TO SEE ASAD ON SATURDAY. ASAD HAD BEEN VERY UPSET BY THE VETO. IF
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THE UNITED STATES HAD ONLY ABSTAINED THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN SOME POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER MOVEMENT. THE UNITED STATES LOST AN OPPORTUNITY TO BRING THE PALESTINIANS INTO A RESOLUTION WHICH WOULD HAVE IN EFFECT BEEN THEIR RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL.

4. RIFAI WENT ON TO SAY THAT FRANKLY JORDAN HAD ONLY TWO POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTION TO SUGGEST. ONE, A UNILATERAL WITHDRAWAL ON THE GOLAN HAD BEEN SUGGESTED EARLIER AND HAD BEEN TURNED DOWN. HE SAW NO CHANCE OF FORWARD MOVEMENT IN THE AREA OF STEP BY STEP DISENGAGEMENT IF THAT COULD NOT BE REVIVED. THE SECOND COURSE OF ACTION, AN INVITATION TO THE PLO TO ATTEND GENEVA FROM THE OUTSET, WAS THE ONLY OTHER DEVELOPMENT HE COULD SUGGEST.

SYRIA HAD BEEN FORCED FURTHER INTO A CORNER BY THE VETO AND WOULD NOT GIVE UP ON NOT ATTENDING GENEVA UNLESS THE PLO WERE INVITED TO COME.

5. RIFAI SAID HE HAD TALKED WITH ASAD ABOUT PRESS REPORTS EMANATING FROM WASHINGTON (LATER DENIED) THAT THE US WAS THINKING OF INVITING FOREIGN MINISTERS AND POSSIBLY THE PLO AMONG THE ARAB DELEGATIONS TO SOME SORT OF PREPARATORY CONFERENCE. ASAD, HE SAID, REACTED VERY NEGATIVELY, SAYING "THAT'S JUST THE AMERICAN PROPOSAL FOR A PREPARATORY CONFERENCE ALL OVER AGAIN."

6. RIFAI THEN WENT ON TO SAY THAT HE WAS VERY GLOOMY ABOUT ANY PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN 1976 OR EVEN IN THE YEARS FOLLOWING. THE ARAB POSITION IN THE VETOED RESOLUTION WAS THEIR ROCK BOTTOM POSITION. THE ISRAELI POSITION WAS OPPOSED TO THIS ARAB VIEW -- THE ISRAELIS WOULD NOT GIVE UP ALL OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORY -- AND IT WAS THEIR ROCK BOTTOM POSITION. IN EFFECT, HE SAW INCREASINGLY THAT WORLD PUBLIC OPINION AND US PUBLIC OPINION AND PERHAPS EVEN THE CONGRESS WOULD COME TO SUPPORT A VIEW ALONG THE LINES OF THE ARAB POSITION OR THE POSITION IN THE RECENT BROOKINGS INSTITUTION STUDY WHICH HE HAD JUST READ. IN THAT EVENTUALITY HE SAW THE ISRAELIS RESORTING TO WAR TO AVOID ACCEPTING A WITHDRAWAL. (HE URGED, INCIDENTALLY, THAT THE US ADOPT THE BROOKINGS STUDY POSITION.)

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UM AS MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED, HE WAS ALSO DEEPLY UNHAPPY ABOUT THE EGYPTIAN POSITION. HE REMARKED IN PASSING THAT YESTERDAY (FEB 2) PRINCE FAHD HAD BEEN VERY SUPPORTIVE OF THE JORDANIAN VIEW AND WAS UPSET AND SURPRISED AT THE EGYPTIAN LETTER TO KING HUSSEIN WHICH RIFAI HAD TAKEN TO RIYADH TO SHOW HIM. HOWEVER, IN THE LONG RUN, RIFAI SAYS, THE SAUDIS WILL SUPPORT A VIEW WHICH WILL TEND TO BRIDGE OVER DIFFERENCES IN ORDER TO BRING ABOUT SOME ARAB UNIFICATION. AT THE MOMENT, GIVEN THE DEEP DIFFERENCES AND IMMEDIATE BRIDGING OVER IS HOPELESS.

8. RIFAI INSISTS THAT JORDAN HAS BECOME A VERY SIGNIFICANT MODERATING INFLUENCE IN SYRIA. HE SAYS THAT JORDAN WAS PRINCIPALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR WORKING OUT THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR COMPROMISE ON THE SEVERAL RECENT UNDOF MANDATE RENEWALS AND ALSO THAT JORDAN HELPED DEVELOP FOR ASAD THE STEPS WHICH HE FOLLOWED IN BRINGING ABOUT THE RECENT LEBANESE CEASEFIRE. HE SAID HE THOUGHT JORDAN COULD BE HELPFUL AND WOULD BE IN ASSURING RENEWAL OF THE MANDATE IN MAY. HE CLAIMS THAT ASAD RECEIVES NO GOOD ADVICE FROM THE PEOPLE AROUND HIM -- "THEY HAVE BLINDERS ON". HE SAID ASAD WANTED HIM TO STAY AND CONTINUE TALKING AT THE END OF THEIR SEVEN-HOUR MARATHON

SESSION IN DAMASCUS LAST SATURDAY. HE SAID THAT ASAD LOOKS ON JORDAN AS A "WINDOW TO THE WEST" AND CONSTANTLY PRESSES RIFAI FOR HIS VIEWS AND ADVICE ON WORLD-WIDE DEVELOPMENTS, BUT WITH SPECIFIC EMPHASIS ON WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE WEST.

9. AS FOR NEXT STEPS, RIFAI FEELS THE SYRIAN POSITION ON THE UNDOF MANDATE RENEWAL WILL BE TO PUSH FOR A TEXT OF A RESOLUTION IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL WHICH IN ITS SUBSTANTIVE STATEMENTS IS IDENTICAL OR NEARLY IDENTICAL TO THAT VETOED BY THE US LAST MONTH. THIS WOULD FACT THE UNITED STATES WITH THE DILEMMA OF VETOING THE UNDOF MANDATE RENEWAL OR ACCEPTING THE TEXT OF THE RESOLUTION WHICH IT HAD VETOED IN JANUARY. HE SAID THE ARABS WOULD CONTROL THE PROCEDURAL VOTES WITH THEIR SUPPORTERS IN THE COUNCIL SO THERE COULD BE NO PARAGRAPH BY PARAGRAPH VOTE. HE GUESSED THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD THEN ABSTAIN. I POINTED OUT FOR HIM, IN CONNECTION WITH ANOTHER PART OF OUR CONVERSATION IN WHICH
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HE SAID THAT JORDAN WOULD NOT WANT TO EXACERBATE THE DANGER OF A NEW WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST, THAT STEPS WHICH MIGHT IN THE END RESULT IN THE MANDATE NOT BEING RENEWED WOULD BE EXTREMELY DANGEROUS FOR ALL OF THE PARTIES CONCERNED. RIFAI SAID HE HAD WORKED LONG AND HARD TO CONVINCE ASAD THAT THEY SHOULD PROVIDE NO PRETEXT TO THE ISRAELIS FOR AN ATTACK. BUT HE LATER INSISTED THAT THE UNITED STATES HAD TO COME FACE TO FACE WITH THE REALITY OF A REASONABLE ARAB POSITION ON PEACE AND THAT THIS POSITION COULD DO MUCH TO MOVE FORWARD THE EFFORTS WHICH WE HAD ALREADY UNDERTAKEN TOWARD PEACE IN THE AREA, EVEN THOUGH HE PERSONALLY REMAINED SKEPTICAL THAT THERE COULD EVER BE A FINAL RESOLUTION OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ISRAELIS AND THE ARABS.

10. I ASKED AS WELL WHETHER THE SYRIANS WERE CONTINUING TO TALK ABOUT ISRAELI EXPULSION FROM THE UN. HE SAID THAT WAS CERTAINLY THE CASE AND THAT THE ARABS WOULD PUSH FOR THIS IN THE AUTUMN IF NOTHING FURTHER HAPPENED. HE ALSO POINTED OUT THAT THERE WOULD HAVE TO BE ANOTHER UNDOF MANDATE RENEWAL IN NOVEMBER. FINALLY HE SAID THAT THE SYRIANS KNEW THEY COULD GET AN EVEN HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTE IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN FAVOR OF A RESOLUTION ALONG THE LINES WHICH THE US HAD VETOED.

1. WE EXPLORED THE SYRIAN AND JORDANIAN REACTION TO SOME OF THE POINTS WHICH THE ISRAELIS HAVE MADE ABOUT PLO PARTICIPATION IN GENEVA. RIFAI SAID HE THOUGHT PLO PRESENCE IN ANOTHER DELEGATION WAS NOT A POSSIBLE POSITION FOR THEM TO ACCEPT. THEY COULD HAVE DONE IT ALREADY WITHOUT CONSULTING THE ISRAELIS OR HAVING THEIR SUGGESTION. THE SYRIANS WOULD INSIST ON THE

PLO PARTICIPATING EQUALLY FROM THE OUTSET. HE DID NOT SAY IT DIRECTLY, BUT HE LEFT OPEN THE IDEA THAT AN "ALL ARAB" DELEGATION WAS NOT COMPLETELY OUT OF THE QUESTION ALTHOUGH THE PROBLEMS OF GETTING DGYPT AND SYRIA TOGETHER WERE LARGE.

12. RIFAI SAID THAT THE UNITED STATES MUST NOW BRING ITSELF TO RECOGNIZE THE NEED FOR SOME FORWARD MOVEMENT ON THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION. YOU SHOULD KNOW, HE TOLD ME, THAT WE ARE THE LAST PEOPLE TO FAVOR DOING SOMETHING
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FOR THE PLO. BUT EVEN SO WE CAN SEE SOME ADVANTAGES IN MAKING THE PLO FACE UP TO THE REALITIES OF THEIR OWN PARTICIPATION. IN FACT, IF THE ISSUE WERE PUSHED, WE STILL BELIEVE THE PLO AS IT IS NOW CONCEIVED WOULD BREAK UP OVER THE QUESTION OF PARTICIPATING IN GENEVA, WITH THE INHERENT RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL THAT SUCH PARTICIPATION IMPLIES. FINALLY, UNITED STATES HAD TO RECOGNIZE THAT THERE WAS A PALESTINIAN PROBLEM OVER AND ABOVE THE QUESTION OF THE PLO. PALESTINIANS HAD RIGHTS AND THESE WOULD HAVE TO BE RECOGNIZED AND THE ISSUES RESOLVED BEFORE STEPS TOWARD A REAL SETTLEMENT COULD BE EFFECTIVE. IN RETURN I POINTED OUT THAT WE HAD COME CLOSE TO SAYING THE SAME THING IN SOME OF OUR RECENT STATEMENTS ABOUT PALESTINIAN INTERESTS, INCLUDING THE SO-CALLED SAUNDERS DOCUMENT.

13. COMMENT: WHILE RIFAI WAS OBVIOUSLY TELLING ME WHAT HE WANTED THE US TO KNOW, THE PICTURE WHICH HE PAINTS OF THE RIGIDITIES OF THE SYRIAN POSITION SEEMS TO BE BORNE OUT BY OTHER REPORTS. IT IS CLEAR TOO THAT RIFAI DOES NOT ACCEPT AS GENUINE OUR CONSISTENT STATEMENTS THAT WE WILL NOT TOLERATE STAGNATION AND STALEMATE AND IS IMPATIENT FOR EVIDENCE WHICH INDICATES THAT WE ARE PREPARED FOR SOME MOVEMENT. I SUSPECT ALSO HE OVERRATES HIS AND THE KING'S INFLUENCE ON ASAD. NEVERTHELESS, AS I REPORTED SOME TIME AGO, I BELIEVE SOME OF THE MORE CAREFULLY THOUGHT OUT SYRIAN APPROACHES TO LEBANON AND THE UN MAY WELL REFLECT SOME JORDANIAN INPUT. AS I WAS LEAVING, RIFAI SAID HE APPRECIATED YOUR PROMISE ABOUT STAYING IN TOUCH AND WOULD LIKE VERY MUCH TO CONTINUE TO DO SO. AT ROCK BOTTOM, I AM CONVINCED THAT NEITHER SYRIA NOR JORDAN DESIRE A WAR; HOWEVER I DO NOT KNOW WHETHER THEY HAVE A CAREFUL ENOUGH APPRECIATION OF THE FACT THAT IF THEY CONTINUE TO PUSH AND PLAY A HIGH STAKES GAME AT THE UN, THEY WILL BE MOVING CLOSE TO MAKING THAT THE ONLY OPTION LEFT FOR THEM AND FOR THE AREA. END COMMENT.

14. I EXPECT TO BE SEEING KING IN THE NEXT FEW HOURS AND WILL GO OVER THE POINTS IN YOUR MESSAGE WITH HIM ALSO.

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